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THESIS

ASSESSING THE THREAT OF ISLAMICALLY MOTIVATED TERRORISM IN BULGARIA

by

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December 2015

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**ASSESSING THE THREAT OF ISLAMICALLY MOTIVATED TERRORISM IN
BULGARIA**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to create a simple model, called the Religious Extremism Manifestation Model (REMM), that will help identify whether specific conditions in Bulgaria are favorable for the emergence of Islamic extremism and terrorism. Building on fundamentalist theory, and Gregg's insights into the causes of religious violence, the REMM model focuses on four variables—groups and leaders, intentions, capabilities, and targets—as necessary conditions for religiously motivated terrorism.

Using the REMM model to analyze the potential for the growth of Islamically motivated terrorism in Bulgaria, the thesis argues that the Bulgarian government needs to increase the following: funding and cooperation between security services; a better understanding of its Muslim minority in order to decrease their sense of alienation; resources and services for minorities that can compete with Islamic non-governmental organizations (NGOs); cooperation with the EU to devise a strategy for managing immigrants; and monitoring the presence of foreign influence, including Islamic NGOs, Bulgarians studying in Islamic schools abroad, and influential materials that could promote religiously motivated terrorism.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
C _{RE}	Capabilities of religious extremists and group
EU	European Union
G _{RE}	Existence of religious extremist group
IOM	International Organization for Migration
I _{RE}	Intentions of religious extremists and group
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
MRF	Movement for Rights and Freedoms
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non- Governmental Organization
P _{RE}	Possibility of violent religious extremism
PTEGs	Pro-Turkish Extremist Groups
REMM	Religious Extremism Manifestation Model
T _{RE}	Targets of the extremist's violent acts
UNHCR	The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

The end of the Cold War created a major shift in global politics and security threats. After a decade of relative calm, September 11 ushered in a new era in which violent conflicts would no longer be solely between superpowers, or even states, but between states and non-state actors. The new global environment where people, information, culture, ideas, and money can move freely has created opportunities for non-state actors, especially transnational terrorists and their supporters. These challenges require states to adopt new policies towards ensuring their security.

One of the greatest threats to state and regional security comes from the rise of religious extremism, particularly radical Islam. This is true not only in the Middle East and in Muslim-majority regions such as South Asia, but also in the Balkans.¹ According to terrorism expert Saul Shay, the presence of a considerable Muslim population on the Balkan Peninsula “fits in well with the global vision of Al Qaeda and its affiliates, which aspire to achieve the triumph of Islamic culture over Western culture (and other Islamic foes), and to establish the ‘Umma’—the community of faithful Muslims which will unite all Muslims and position Islam as the main global force.”² Historically, the Muslim population on the Balkans is mainly the descendants of Turkish Sunni Muslims. However, with the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, Muslim migrants have begun to change the ethnic and religious landscape of the Balkans, as have the increasing influences from neighboring Muslim countries and states in the Arabian Peninsula. These changes in both the Muslim population and new external influences have presented challenges for state security, and new opportunities for Islamically motivated transnational terrorists.

¹ Europol, European Law Enforcement Agency, *European Union Situation and Trend Report 2015*, (The Hague: European Police Office, July 6, 2015), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2015>.

² Shaul Shay, *Islamic Terror and the Balkans* (New Brunswick, NJ; London: International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2007), 202.

As a country located in the center of the Balkan Peninsula, Bulgaria has successfully maintained a relatively peaceful coexistence with its ethnic and religious groups throughout the last millennia. However, with the rise of transnational terrorism and a shift in ethnic and religious demographics in Bulgaria, this relationship is changing. In 2013, the U.S. Department of State reported that the terrorist threat is increasing for Bulgaria. The report stated that “an influx of asylum seekers from Syria has exacerbated border security challenges, raised interethnic tensions, and challenged underfunded state agencies.”³ The concerns of the U.S. Department of State that foreign fighters could blend in with the flow of migrants who move in and out of Bulgaria remains in the country report to date.⁴ In addition to the U.S. State Department report, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) released a map in 2014, which “outlines the territory they aspire to conquer within next five years”; Bulgaria is included in their plans.⁵ Balkan journalist Dusica Tomovic provides further evidence of Bulgaria’s potentially rising threat posed by Islamic terrorism, citing a CIA report that suggests the number of Balkan Muslims who want to join ISIS is growing; in fact, Balkan Muslims are just behind Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia.⁶ In addition to the threat posed by ISIS, the Muslim population in Bulgaria is exposed to the ideas of Islamization from neighboring countries, such as Turkey—which looks at Bulgaria as a former territory and has a history of influencing the Muslim communities there—and from states in the Arabian Gulf that provide money and other resources to Muslim minorities.⁷

³ U.S. Department of State, “Country Report: Europe Overview,” in *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*, Chapter 2, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224822.htm>.

⁴ U.S. Department of State, “Country Report: Europe Overview,” in *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014*, Chapter 2, accessed July 17, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239406.htm>.

⁵ Frances Martel, “Isis Releases Map of 5-Year Plan to Spread from Spain to China,” *Breitbart*, July 1, 2014, <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/07/01/isis-releases-map-of-5-year-plan-to-spread-from-spain-to-china/>.

⁶ Dusica Tomovic, “Hundreds of Balkan Jihadists Have Joined ISIS,” *Balkan Insight*, September 17, 2014, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/hundreds-of-balkan-jihadist-reportedly-joined-isis>.

⁷ Alex Alexiev (Chairman of the Centre for Balkan and Black Sea Studies in Sofia, Bulgaria, fellow at the Hudson Institute, worked for RAND Corporation, and as advisor at the Pentagon and CIA), “The End of Erdogan’s Islamization,” *National Review Online*, January 18, 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/node/368583/print>.

B. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this thesis is to create a simple model, called the Religious Extremism Manifestation Model (REMM), that will help identify whether specific conditions in Bulgaria are favorable for the emergence of Islamic extremism and terrorism. The model focuses on four variables in particular: the creation of groups, which consist of leaders and followers; intentions, especially radical interpretations of a faith that call for violence; the acquisition of capabilities that can lead to violence; and the selection of targets for terrorist acts. This thesis asserts that the presence of these four variables produce a high threat for terrorist acts done in the name of religion. Furthermore, this thesis aims to use this model to assess the prospects for greater Islamic extremism and terrorism in Bulgaria.

This thesis uses academic and policy literature to build this model, specifically Fundamentalism Theory, which looks at perceptions of threat to a religion and the literalist interpretations of scripture and the acts of violence these perceptions produce, along with Gregg's four variables of religiously motivated violence—context, leaders, followers, and resources—and the violent interpretations they produce.⁸ The thesis begins with an examination of the social, political and economic environment surrounding Muslim communities in Bulgaria. It discusses the Communist government's attempts at assimilation and "Bulgarization" of the Muslim population, and the reaction of these groups to the government's campaigns, particularly in the 1980s. The thesis also includes recent trends among the Bulgarian Muslim minority, including the effects of external actors on the community. The thesis concludes by applying the proposed model to the Bulgarian case, in an attempt to identify key changes that may affect the Muslim minority in Bulgaria and the conditions under which these Muslims may become radicalized and a threat to state security.

⁸ Heather Gregg, *The Path to Salvation: Religious Violence from the Crusades to Jihad* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 19.

C. FINDINGS

Using the REMM model to assess the potential for Islamically motivated terrorism in Bulgaria, this thesis proposes the following areas of concern for the Bulgarian government and security forces. First, regarding the potential of groups and leaders, the Bulgarian government should pay particular attention to Muslim minority groups who live in concentrated isolated areas, and especially to groups who may be receiving aid and education from Islamic charities. Muslim Roma in city slums and the “Bulgarian Mohamedans” (Pomaks) are two particular groups of concern.

Second, with regard to intentions, the government and security forces should pay particular attention to Muslim schools that are popping up in Muslim communities, particularly ones not registered by the government and yet receiving foreign aid and teaching conservative Muslim ideas and values. The government should also monitor religious students who study abroad, including where they are studying and how they are using their religious education once they return home.

Third, with respect to resources, the Bulgarian government and security forces should work to monitor criminal groups and smugglers for the influx of weapons that could be used for terrorist activities. Also, identifying vulnerabilities of the Muslim minorities in the country and addressing these vulnerabilities as best as possible, particularly among groups that lack basic resources, is important for reducing grievances and the influx of foreign influence.

Finally, with regard to potential targets of Islamic terrorists in Bulgaria, the government and security forces should improve security in the Pamporovo winter resort, which is located in the middle of the Rhodope Mountain (where Pomaks are concentrated); and the Varna airport; Black Sea resorts; and Bulgaria’s nuclear power plant and oil refinery.

Improving Bulgarian security against the threat of Islamically motivated terrorism will most likely be challenged by the following four key factors: a small number of security forces and lack of interagency cooperation; underfunded official Muslim organizations in Bulgaria; the lack of a database of foreign Islamic non-governmental

organizations (NGOs) and Islamic students abroad; the underfunded State Agency for Refugees; and poorly integrated Muslim minorities in the country.

D. OUTLINE OF THESIS

The thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter II provides a brief overview of key literature on religiously motivated violence. It focuses specifically on fundamentalism theory and Gregg's conditions that lead to interpretations of faith that call for violence. From this literature review, the chapter presents a basic model of radicalization and terrorism to analyze the Muslim minority in Bulgaria. The model focuses on four variables in particular: the creation of groups, which consist of leaders and followers; intentions, especially radical interpretations of a faith that call for violence; the acquisition of capabilities that can lead to violence; and the selection of targets for terrorist acts.

Chapter III provides a brief overview of Bulgaria, particularly the historical events that created the country's religious and ethnic diversity and its Muslim minority in particular. This chapter also discusses contemporary religious and ethnic demographics of Bulgaria. Finally, the chapter highlights major violent acts in Bulgaria from 1980 to the present.

Chapter IV uses each of the variables in the model to assess the potential for Islamically motivated terrorism in the country. Specifically, it addresses the role that changing demographics and external influence in Bulgaria may have for transforming the country's Muslim minority into potential security threats.

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II. RELIGIOUSLY MOTIVATED TERRORISM AND THE REMM MODEL

This chapter provides a brief overview of key literature on religiously motivated violence, including terrorism caused by radical interpretations of religion, and uses this literature to build a basic model of radicalization and terrorism with which to analyze the Muslim minority in Bulgaria.

It begins with literature on the causes of religious violence, paying particular attention to fundamentalism theory and Gregg's four variables for investigating religiously motivated violence—context, leaders, followers, and resources. From this discussion, the chapter then proposes a basic model, called the Religious Extremism Manifestation Model (REMM) that will help identify whether specific conditions favor the emergence of Islamic extremism and terrorism in Bulgaria. The model focuses on four variables in particular: the creation of groups, which consist of leaders and followers; intentions, especially radical interpretations of a faith that call for violence; the acquisition of capabilities that can lead to violence; and the selection of targets for terrorist acts.

A. CAUSES OF RELIGIOUSLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Several scholars offer theories that attempt to explain the conditions under which violence and terrorism are committed in the name of religion. The research of Juergensmeyer; Almond, Appleby, and Sivan; Robins and Post; and Gregg provides particularly useful theories to explain the rise of religiously motivated violence and terrorism.

Perhaps the most well-known scholar of religiously motivated violence is sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer, who asserts that religious violence is the earthly manifestation of a symbolic, eternal battle between good and evil depicted in most religious scriptures—what he calls “cosmic war.” This war can never be lost, but it is

often not winnable in this lifetime.⁹ Those who participate in this cosmic battle of good versus evil are participating in a battle that is both personal and much greater than themselves. Those who die in battle are martyrs of the faith. Therefore, Juergensmeyer argues that when the ideas of sacred battles are brought to earthly battlefields, the conflict automatically transforms into a cosmic war.

Robins and Post build on these observations to argue that charismatic leaders play a particularly important role in what they call apocalyptic war. They argue that, during difficult times, people tend to look for support in and find salvation from religion.¹⁰ Charismatic leaders are able to provide guidance to followers and hope in times of crisis. Charismatic leaders also are able to interpret scriptures, including those justifying violence, and persuade followers to take action.

Another set of theories focuses on what is commonly called “fundamentalism.” Most Christians and Westerners tend to think of the word “fundamentalism” in a negative way. They associate it with something bad, such as the dark side of a religion, as with Islam, or with terrorism. Esposito notes that people often perceive fundamentalism as expressing the eternal war between Christianity and Islam, which is rooted back into human history.¹¹ However, most scholars argue that fundamentalism is a fairly new phenomenon, which “emerged from the Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.”¹² In that regard, despite what those religions profess, fundamentalist movements constitute a reaction against perceived or real threats to the faith. For fundamentalists, the Holy Scriptures are both absolute truth and the foundation of the believers’ faith. In this sense, fundamentalism is any movement that calls for strict and literal adherence to fundamental religious principles.

⁹ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 161.

¹⁰ Robert Robins and Jerrold Post, *Political Paranoia* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1997), 114.

¹¹ John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.

¹² Gabriel Almond, Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalism around the World* (Chicago; London: University Of Chicago Press, 2003), 92.

Even in secular states, religion is an important component of the society. However, fundamentalists feel obliged to ensure that their religion does not erode in the modern world. Therefore, fundamentalists want to protect the “orthodoxy (right belief) or orthopraxis (right behavior).”¹³ They fight to preserve religious practices and to protect religion from secularization and from new ideological influences. At the same time, fundamentalists use the modern world’s various innovations to protect the old traditions, even to create new ideologies of their own. The Internet is an example of how new technology is widely used by fundamentalists to spread their ideas and to recruit new members. Although, fundamentalists utilize innovative ways to struggle against the forces of erosion, they claim that they base every fighting method on their sacred past.¹⁴

Almond, Appleby, and Sivan propose that fundamentalism has nine principles: five ideological (reactivity to the marginalization of religion, selectivity, moral Manichaeism, Absolutism and inerrancy, millennialism, and messianism) and four organizational (elect, chosen membership; sharp boundaries; authoritarian organization; and behavioral requirements).

It is a common misconception that militant passages in religious scriptures motivate religious violence. Gregg, however, argues that these passages “are, by themselves, not sufficient for explaining religiously motivated violence,” but the interpretations by religious leaders are the primary cause of religious violence,¹⁵ along with the socio-political circumstances in which individuals’ lives shape their perceptions and interpretations of holy texts. Therefore, one needs to understand the conditions and the environment under which the individuals draw the interpretations that lead to violence. Also, the individuals who make these interpretations must have authority and resources in order to inspire followers. In her research Gregg determines four variables that explain the reasons and motives for religious violence: *context, leaders, followers, and resources*.¹⁶

¹³ Almond, Appleby, and Sivan, *Strong Religion*, 92.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gregg, *Path to Salvation*, 19.

¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

To understand and investigate the conditions that call for religious violence, Gregg asks several important questions for each variable: “What are the social and political circumstances under which these interpretations are being generated? Who is interpreting the faith, and by what authority? Why are adherents to the faith embracing these interpretations as true? What resources are necessary for interpretations to become violent reality?”¹⁷ The answers to these questions could provide the reasons why religiously motivated violence occurs in the first place.

Although the last three categories—leaders, followers, and resources—are clear and self-explanatory, the first one, the context, is broad and includes many factors, ranging from the economic, social, religious, and political environment. Simply understanding the environment does not provide information on why a particular group uses violence as a reaction against a real or perceived threat. In most societies there are different religious or ethnic groups, who live under the same social, political and economic conditions, but not every group turns to violent means. This shows that the leaders’ views shaped by the socio-political situation or context are a significant, but not sufficient factor for violence, and other variables are needed.

Building on these observations, this thesis proposes that it is important to understand the conditions that inspire violent intentions in the minds of religious leaders. Leaders, in turn, channel these ideas and direct them towards violent acts. Therefore, not only are the leaders’ worldviews important, but also their intentions. Extremist views alone will not cause religiously motivated violence and terrorism; the combination of extreme ideas and the desire to take action and perpetrate specific acts of violence are what produce religiously motivated violence.

B. REMM MODEL

Building on the principles of fundamentalism theory and Gregg’s four variables of religiously motivated violence—context, interpretations, leaders and followers, and resources—a basic causal argument can be articulated.

¹⁷ Gregg, *Path to Salvation*, 20.

$P_{RE} = f(G_{RE}, C_{RE}, I_{RE}, T_{RE})$ – Religious Extremism Manifestation Model

P_{RE} – Possibility of violent religious extremism;

G_{RE} – Existence of religious extremist group;

C_{RE} – Capabilities of religious extremists and group;

I_{RE} – Intentions of religious extremists and group;

T_{RE} – Targets of the extremist’s violent acts.

The first variable G_{RE} (Group’s Existence) proposes that significant terrorist attacks cannot occur without the aid of a group. Groups provide organization and the accumulation of resources, learning, and emotional support to individuals. Furthermore, groups are dangerous because they can sustain a movement and its violent intents beyond a single attack. Much has been made of “lone wolf attacks”—individuals who act on their own without the aid of a group. However, the most deadly and disruptive terrorist attacks to date have still been perpetrated by groups, not individuals, including the 9/11 attacks in the United States, the Bali bombings in 2002, the London attacks in 2005, and so on. Therefore, law enforcement should focus its efforts on identifying and targeting groups.

The second variable C_{RE} (Capabilities) describes the capabilities of the existing religious extremist group. It includes the level of the extremists’ knowledge, their criminal or terrorist experience, financial support, weapons (small arms, explosives etc.) and other sources needed for conducting terrorist acts. There is a particular set of resources, which should be investigated, specifically “material resources,” such as money, real estate, and ties to the military; “social resources,” including networks and organizations; and “technological resources,” such as transportation and communication.¹⁸ Ultimately, resources allow the religious groups to increase the variety of means and methods of violent acts.

The third variable I_{RE} (Intentions) includes the aim of the religious extremist group and desired effects of the terrorist act. This variable could include some of the ideological traits of fundamentalism articulated by Almond et al., such as reactivity to the marginalization of religion; moral Manichaeism; millennialism; and messianism. It is

¹⁸ Ibid., 31.

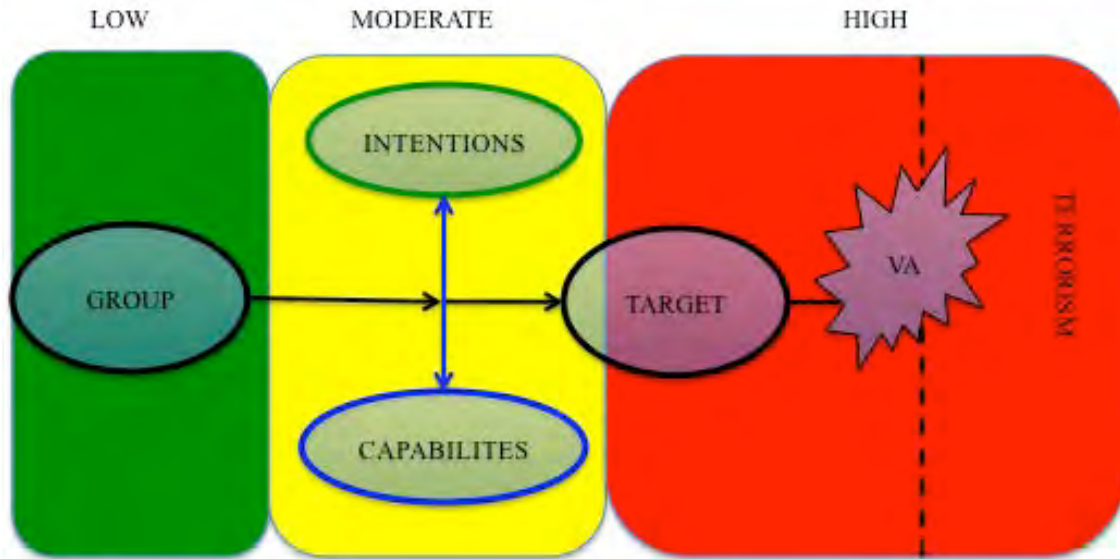
also this variable that determines whether groups are religious in their motives or have other motives like ethnic grievances.

These ideological characteristics are shaped by the socio-political environment, which corresponds to the “context” variable articulated by Gregg. She argues that the environment shapes leaders views, and it is leaders who call for violence. However, this thesis asserts that the views of leaders are necessary but no sufficient factor. Therefore, this thesis also offers the idea that leaders should have violent intentions.

The sequence of capabilities and intentions is interchangeable. For example, the group could build first its capabilities and then pursue its goals. But if the leaders first react to a particular situation with violent intentions, then the leaders can purposely start building capabilities. The difference between these two cases is that, when the group already has capabilities, it can immediately react to perceived or real threats. In the second case, even though the group has violent intentions, it needs time to acquire the required capabilities in order to achieve its goals.

T_{RE} (Targets) is the last variable in the proposed model. Although this variable is not covered by the fundamentalist theory or Gregg’s framework, this thesis argues that until the movement chooses a target against which to channel its violent intentions, it cannot act. Therefore, target selection is a necessary part of a terrorist act. This model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Time and threat analysis of the religious extremism transformation into terrorism



The level of threat can be further evaluated by the presence of the model's variables, included in the threat evaluation matrix in Table 1.

Table 1. Threat evaluation matrix

Threat / Risk	Variables / Determinants			
	G_{RE}	C_{RE}	I_{RE}	T_{RE}
Low	Yes	No	No	No
Moderate	Yes	Yes	No	No
	Yes	No	Yes	No
High	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Following the designed matrix, the level of threat can be estimated as Low if only the variable **G_{RE}** represents the existing of some extremist individuals or groups. Without the rest of the determinants, we can conclude that there is no current real threat. After achievement of proper capabilities **C_{RE}**, the combination of the presence of both variables **G_{RE}** and **C_{RE}** turns the threat to the moderate level. A high level of threat includes the presence of the variables **G_{RE}**, **C_{RE}**, and **I_{RE}**.

C. CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a brief overview of key literature on religiously motivated violence. From this literature, it developed a model for identifying the emergence of religiously motivated groups with terrorist aims. The next chapter highlights the history of Islam in Bulgaria, the emergence of Bulgaria's Muslim minority groups, and trends in terrorism in the country.

III. HISTORY OF ISLAM IN BULGARIA

This chapter reviews the most important events in Bulgarian history related to the religious and ethnic divisions in the country, with the goal of better understanding the current tensions in Bulgarian society, and the potential for Islamically motivated terrorism.

The chapter begins by providing a brief overview of the Bulgarian state. It then considers the Muslim minority in Bulgaria, followed by a detailed analysis of terrorist acts in Bulgaria, beginning in the 1980s. Overall, this chapter finds that terrorist incidents in Bulgaria began in the 1980s, partially in reaction to policies to “Bulgarize” Muslim minorities. Following Bulgaria’s independence in 1989, two prominent political parties were formed to help address the grievances of the country’s Muslim minorities. Recent terrorist acts have come not from Bulgaria’s Turkish minorities, but rather from outsiders and those affiliated with the Islamic State.

A. BRIEF HISTORY OF BULGARIA

Bulgaria is one of the oldest states in Europe, officially established in 681 AD on the Balkan Peninsula. The first citizens were mainly representatives of three ethnic tribes: Thracians, Slavs, and Bulgarians. The rise of the Byzantine Empire compelled these different tribes to unite, with Bulgarians assuming leadership; however, Europe and the Byzantine Empire considered Bulgarians inferior because of the pagan nature of the country.¹⁹ Bulgarian leaders realized that the use of military power was not enough to maintain the country’s independence. Therefore, in 865 AD, Khan Boris adopted Christianity as the one and the only religion for the people, “which had a profound and far-reaching effect on Bulgarian history.”²⁰ Khan Boris had a higher aim, however; not only did he want to achieve political recognition on the international stage, but he also wanted to create one nation united by faith, Eastern Orthodox Christianity. That same

¹⁹ Republic of Bulgaria, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Consulate General of the Republic of Bulgaria in Los Angeles, USA, accessed June 23, 2015, <http://www.mfa.bg/embassies/usagc2/bg/1883/index.html>5.

²⁰ Stanley Evans, *A Short History of Bulgaria* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1960), 40.

year, Khan Boris was baptized under the name of Michael after the Byzantine Emperor Michael, who was the new Bulgarian king's sponsor. From that time forward, Orthodox Christianity has been the official religion of Bulgaria.²¹

During the Middle Ages, Crusaders passed through Bulgaria on their way to the Holy Land, making the region unstable. In 1352, in the midst of the decline of the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Turks took advantage of the weakened Balkans and started their invasion of Europe. The Turks, through small but decisive steps, successfully conquered the whole Balkan Peninsula and parts of Eastern Europe. Thus, from 1396 to 1878, Bulgaria was under Turkish rule. During this period of history, the Turks destroyed many Bulgarian fortresses and cultural monuments; they also burned villages and massacred some of the Christian population.²² The impact on Bulgarian culture was significant. As Stanley Evans describes, "The normal development of the Bulgarian people was interrupted and a severe blow was struck at its economic life and its civilization."²³ However, almost 500 years of rule and brutal practices could not break the Bulgarian spirit and identity. During these difficult times, Orthodox Christianity and religious leaders played an important role in saving the Bulgarian nation. After the Russo-Turkish War in 1878, Bulgaria was proclaimed, for the third time in its history, an independent state. Many ethnic Turks, who were Muslim, did not leave the country, and they became Bulgarian citizens. Thus, the Bulgarian Muslim community was created.

After the Second World War, Bulgaria came under Soviet influence. The Bulgarian communist government had one goal, to create a secular state united by ideas of socialist nationalism. The active practice of religions was forbidden.²⁴ The Bulgarian Communist party attempted to further unite the population through a process of "Bulgarization." For example, in 1960, the Communist government adopted the new "Law on Names," which forced citizens with no Bulgarian background to change their

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 70.

²⁴ Robert Lee Wolff, *The Balkans in Our Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), p 550.

names to ones that were more Bulgarian.²⁵ However, Bulgarization was slow to take root. In 1985, a few supporters of this policy, who were part of the Communist party's *nomenklatura*,²⁶ decided that the time for decisive measures had come. Often with the use of force, Turks in Bulgaria were compelled to change their names from Turkish to Bulgarian. Those who refused were forced into exile or imprisoned. The resistance was strong and resulted in numerous deaths, with no official data on the number of victims. As a continued effort at Bulgarization in 1989, the Bulgarian authorities forced the Turkish minority to leave the country and move to Turkey; however, not all of them left; significant numbers remain in specific areas, which are discussed below.²⁷

These policies of Bulgarization largely stopped with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and Bulgaria's transition to democracy. However, as Bulgarian scholar Nikolov asserts, today's Turkish minority in Bulgaria, "instead of being a bridge between the two states," is used as an instrument of political leverage between Turkey and Bulgaria.²⁸

B. CURRENT MUSLIM MINORITIES

The current Muslim population of Bulgaria consists mainly of three ethnic groups: Turks, Roma (Gypsies), and Bulgarian Mohammedans (Pomaks). Even though Pomaks constitute 1 percent of the population, the Bulgarian government still does not officially recognize them as a minority. As seen from the 2011 census data, Muslims comprise approximately 8 percent of the population.²⁹ Each of these groups is described in further detail below.

²⁵ Stephan Nikolov, "Integration of the Ethnic Minorities in the Bulgarian Armed Forces" (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1996), 8, <http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/95-97/nikolov.pdf>.

²⁶ This word is used to describe the Bulgarian communist party elite.

²⁷ "Assimilation of Bulgaria's Turkish Minority," accessed September 30, 2015, <http://assimilation-of-turks-in-bg.tumblr.com/>. No date

²⁸ Nikolov, "Integration of Ethnic Minorities," 8.

²⁹ National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, "2011 Population Census," 2, accessed July 20, 2015, http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/Census2011final_en.pdf.

1. The Turks

The historical evidence shows that Turkish tribes started to invade the Balkan Peninsula and Asia Minor in the early third and fourth centuries AD, prior to the establishment of Islam.³⁰ Migration continued even after Bulgaria adopted Christianity as its official state religion in the ninth century. Turkish tribes, which were mostly Muslim, further settled in Bulgaria during Byzantine rule from 1018–1185 AD. This population included the Pecheneg, Uzes, and Cuman tribes, which massively invaded the Balkans. The last and the most significant wave of migration occurred during the Ottoman conquest of the Balkan states during the fourteenth century.

Within this history, there is the narrative that Turks in Bulgaria engaged in brutal, large-scale forced (or in some places voluntary) conversion to Islam. During the Cold War, the Communist government in Bulgaria used this narrative in its assimilation campaigns, claiming that there was no Turkish ethnicity, but “Turkicized” Bulgarians, which justified their policy of Bulgarization or re-Bulgarization of these people. The Communist party’s Bulgarization policies included a ban on Muslim dress, the Turkish language, and religious practices. The campaign went so far as to even change the names of dead people in Muslim graveyards.³¹ Despite these attempts at forced assimilation, the Communist regime had only minor successes in eradicating the Turkish Muslim minority.³² Although suppressed, the Turkish minority group succeeded in protecting and keeping its identity and language alive.³³

In addition to Turkish identity, Islam conflicted with communist ideology and the Communist party perceived Islam as a potential threat to its socialist aims. However, the Communist party claimed that the religion was dangerous and that Muslims were

³⁰ Fatme Muyhtar, *The Human Rights of Muslims in Bulgaria in Law and Policies since 1878* (Sofia: Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, November 2003), 5, <http://www.bghelsinki.org/media/uploads/special/muslims-2003.pdf>.

³¹ Lillia Petrova, “The Integration Process of the Turkish Minority in Bulgaria in the Post-Cold War Era,” 2002, <http://www.kakanien-revisited.at/beitr/fallstudie/LPetkova1.pdf>.

³² Muyhtar, *Human Rights of Muslims*, 5.

³³ Laura Olson Osterman, “Movements for Islam Revival and Ethnic Consciousness among Rural Bulgarian Muslims in the Post-Communist Period,” 7, accessed May 11, 2015, http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/2014_828-10g_Osterman.pdf.

suspected of being loyal to Turkey, which lay on the other side of the Iron Curtain.³⁴ As a result, during this period, Islamic communities' leaders, *hodjas*, were driven underground. Despite these efforts, Islam persisted as a religion in the country.

After the fall of the Communist regime on November 10, 1989, the government, pushed by human rights protests, retreated from its policy of forced assimilation and allowed the Turks to restore their names, Islamic customs, and the use of their language. These changes were legalized through two governmental acts in 1990.³⁵ Overall, during the period of transition to democracy, the Muslims in Bulgaria acquired greater religious freedom.³⁶

2. The Bulgarian Mohammedans (Pomaks)

The origin of Pomaks is controversial, due to the fact that they occupy territories in three Balkan states: Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece (see Figure 4). Thus, these countries have their own theories about the origin of Pomaks, based on each state's national interest. The term Pomak is well known in these three countries but, in Bulgaria, the Pomak population is called Bulgarian Mohammedans, as the term Pomak has negative meaning. Furthermore, Bulgarian politicians prefer to use the term "Bulgarian Mohammedans" because it supports the nationalistic theory of forced conversion of Bulgarian Christians to Islam.³⁷ However, the term Pomak is used here to provide continuity across the three countries where this group resides.

Pomaks are concentrated in a specific region in Bulgaria known as Rhodope Mountain. In theory, this region was exposed to three distinct paths of forced and violent

³⁴ Petrova, "The Integration Process."

³⁵ "Names of Bulgarian Nationals Act" (March 5, 1990), The State Council of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. This law allows Muslims in Bulgaria to restore their names, accessed October 10, 2015, <http://dediserver.eu/hosting/ethnodoc/data/BG19900305.pdf>, and the amendment to this law in November, 1990, that regulates the administrative procedures.

³⁶ Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, "Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria," 2004, 27, <http://www.balkanethnology.org/files/library/E%20&%20V/Muslims.pdf>.

³⁷ Maria Koinova, *Minorities in South-Eastern Europe: Muslims of Bulgaria* (Glyka Nera, Greece: Center for Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe–Southeast Europe [CEDIME-SE]), December 1999, <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/english/reports/CEDIME-Reports-Minorities-in-Bulgaria.html>.

Islamization and Turkization throughout of the 500-year period of Turkish rule. The forced Islamization, as Mutaftchieva asserts, was conducted by taking the indigenous population as slaves and then making them Muslims. The other line of conversion was by intermixed marriages, namely when Turkish soldiers married Bulgarian women.³⁸ However, the strongest example of Islamization was the military recruitment of Bulgarian Christian boys for the Ottoman Army of converted soldiers, known as the Janissary.³⁹

However, in addition to these believed methods of conversion, there is another theory supported by many Bulgarian historians, called “voluntary assimilation.” These scholars have relative agreement that the reasons for voluntary affiliation with Islam were poverty and the aspiration for higher social status in the society. Muslims in the Ottoman Empire had quite a few privileges compared with Christians. The Muslims did not pay the state tax that was subjected to non-Muslims. It was easier for people who could not afford to pay it simply to accept Islam.⁴⁰ This form of voluntary Islamization was typical throughout most parts of the Ottoman Empire.

The Turkish view of the origin of Pomaks is completely different from the Bulgarian.⁴¹ Turks claim that this ethnic group originated from descendants of the Cumano-Cupchag Turks, who have nothing in common with Bulgarians.⁴² At the same time, Greeks have their own theory about Pomak Muslims, who inhabited the northern territories of Greece. The theory goes that Bulgarian-speaking Muslims are descendants of the ancient Greeks and Thracians.⁴³

Even the Pomaks are divided on the matter of their origin because of so many assimilation campaigns and different interpretations of history implemented by the state authorities of Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. In the case of Bulgaria, the major religious group, Eastern Orthodox Christians, still relies on old stereotypes and the belief that

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ali Eminov, *Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997).

⁴¹ Muyhtar, *Human Rights of Muslims*.

⁴² Ibid., 10.

⁴³ Ibid.

Pomaks are traitors of the faith. This has resulted in ethnic and religious tensions in Bulgarian society. This situation is maintained to a certain degree by authorities.

However, the Pomaks' position in today's Bulgarian society is very complex, due to the fact that they do not have a clear ethnic identity. Generally speaking, the Pomak ethnic group is not recognized as a minority by the Bulgarian government, as shown in 2001 and 2011 censuses.⁴⁴ Moreover, the population of Pomaks living in a compact zone on the Bulgarian south border allows this group to be influenced by other neighboring countries. In particular, this closeness to Turkey provides easy opportunities for propaganda campaigns, a major concern under Communist rule and a concern today. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that some Islamic NGOs that use religion as a tool for influence have appeared in Bulgaria.⁴⁵ If true, this is a potential security concern, particularly if these NGOs are spreading radical ideologies and increasing their groups' capabilities. These points are further elaborated in Chapter IV.

3. The Roma Muslims (Gypsies)

The origin of the Roma ethnic group in Bulgaria is controversial.⁴⁶ Scholars assert that the first migrations of Roma started 1,000 years ago by moving from India to Europe.⁴⁷ During this time, the Roma spread throughout Europe, Asia, and the Balkans. Reaching the Balkans during the period of the Byzantine Empire, they started to settle there, and some converted to Islam. After the collapse of the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire became a new and powerful hegemon on the Balkan Peninsula; however, the Roma population increased in the Balkans due to persecution and slavery in different parts of Europe.⁴⁸ The main factors that attracted Roma to the Balkans were

⁴⁴ Ibid., 3

⁴⁵ Alex Alexiev, "Radical Islam Exists in Bulgaria and It Becomes a Graver Danger for the Society," Focus News Agency, July 20, 2012, <http://www.focus-fen.net/opinion/0000/00/00/2957/>.

⁴⁶ Using the term Roma for the purpose of this research it means Roma who are Muslims (Roma Muslims). The biggest share of this minority is Christians.

⁴⁷ Muyhtar, *Human Rights of Muslims*.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 11.

favorable and tolerant attitudes of the local population and fertile lands. Therefore, the Balkans became a “second fatherland for Gypsies.”⁴⁹

The Roma presence increased drastically in Bulgaria during Ottoman rule. However, different sources provide controversial information about this group. There is evidence that the number of Roma was not accurately counted because, in the Ottoman Empire, there was no division on ethnical grounds but rather on religious affiliation. Despite this, from 1522–1523, tax registers placed the number of Roma households in the Empire at 16,591.⁵⁰ The first recorded census data, after the independence of Bulgaria in 1878, shows that the Roma represented 1.87 percent of the population or 37, 600 persons.⁵¹

Although the Roma population was predominantly rural, the Communist government provided more opportunities for them to settle in big cities. However, prior to Bulgarian independence and the end of the communist era, Roma Muslims, like all Muslim minorities, were subject to the same violent and forceful assimilations conducted during Bulgarization campaigns. Thus, their religion and names were reputedly changed.⁵² Consequently, identifying the exact number of Roma Muslims is difficult.

C. BULGARIA’S ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHICS TODAY

Recent census data provides a picture of Bulgaria’s ethnic and religious demographics following the end of Communist rule. In February 2011, the government conducted the 17th “Population and Housing Census” in Bulgarian history and first since the country became a member of the European Union. According to the data provided by the National Statistics Institute, the total Bulgarian population numbered 7,364,570.⁵³ Figure 2 shows the population by district.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

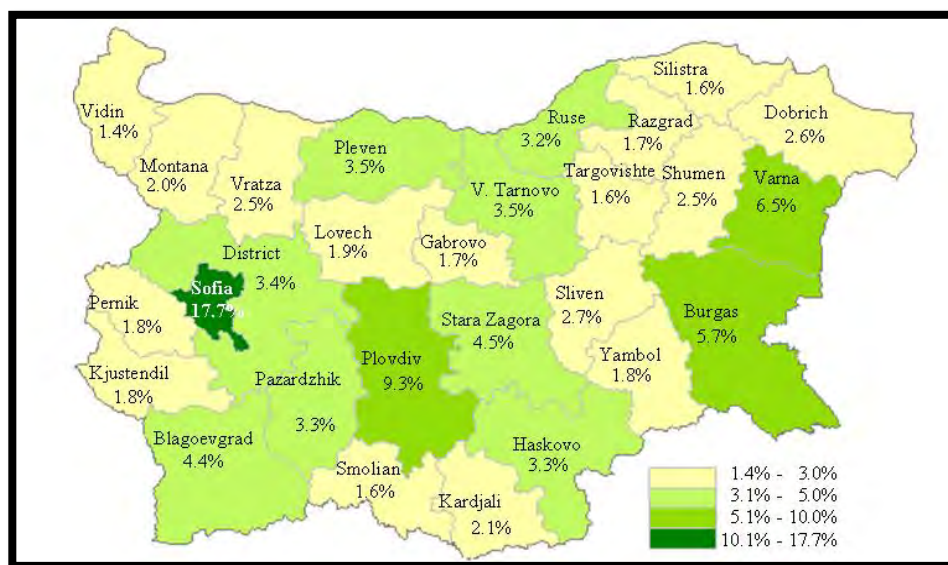
⁵⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, “2011 Population Census,” 2.

Figure 2. Bulgaria's population by district



Source: InvestBulgaria Agency, "Demographic Profile," accessed July 20, 2015, <http://www.investbg.government.bg/en/pages/demographic-profile-110.html>.

This map shows that the greatest concentration of citizens is in the capital, Sofia, and that the areas of Plovdiv, Varna, and Burgas have the next highest population densities. However, overall, Bulgaria is divided into 28 districts, none of which has more than 10 percent of the population outside the capital. Furthermore, as described below, the districts of Kardzhali and Razgrad have the highest concentration of Muslims, although their numbers are relatively small to the overall population.

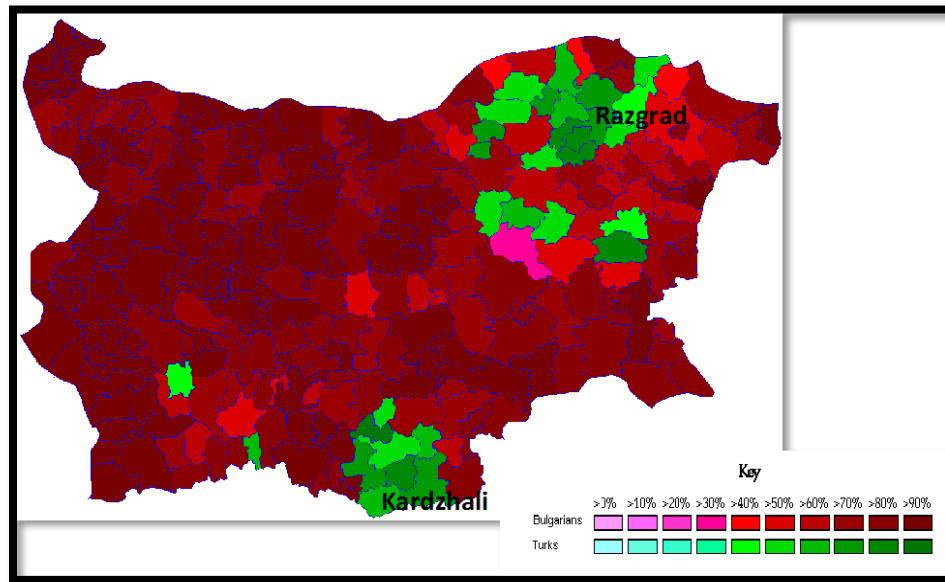
The overall population of Bulgaria is further divided into ethnic groups as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Bulgaria's population by ethnic groups as of February 2011

Total Population	Bulgarian	Turkish	Roma/ Gypsies	Other	Not stated
7,364,570	5,664,624	588,318	325,343	49,304	53,391
100%	84.8%	8.8%	4.9%	0.7%	0.8%

As indicated by the above table, the biggest ethnic group is Bulgarian, which constitutes 5,664,624 people, or 84.8 percent of those who responded to the question of ethnicity. Compared to the results from the 2001 census, this group has increased by 0.9 percent.⁵⁴ People from the Bulgarian ethnic group constitute a majority in all districts, excluding two, Kardzhali and Razgrad, where Bulgarians represent 30.22 percent and 43.0 percent respectively. This is also represented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Areas of concentration of Turkish ethnic group in Bulgaria



Source: Wikipedia, "Demographics of Bulgaria," accessed July 20, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Bulgaria

The second largest ethnic group, comprised of 588,318 people, described itself as ethnic Turks, which is 8.8 percent of the population.⁵⁵ This ethnic group has decreased by 0.6 percent from the previous census.⁵⁶ Within this group, 63.7 percent of Turks live in several districts: Kardzhali, Razgrad, Targovishte, Shumen, Silistra, Dobrich, Ruse, and Burgas. These districts constitute the southeastern and northern parts of Bulgaria.

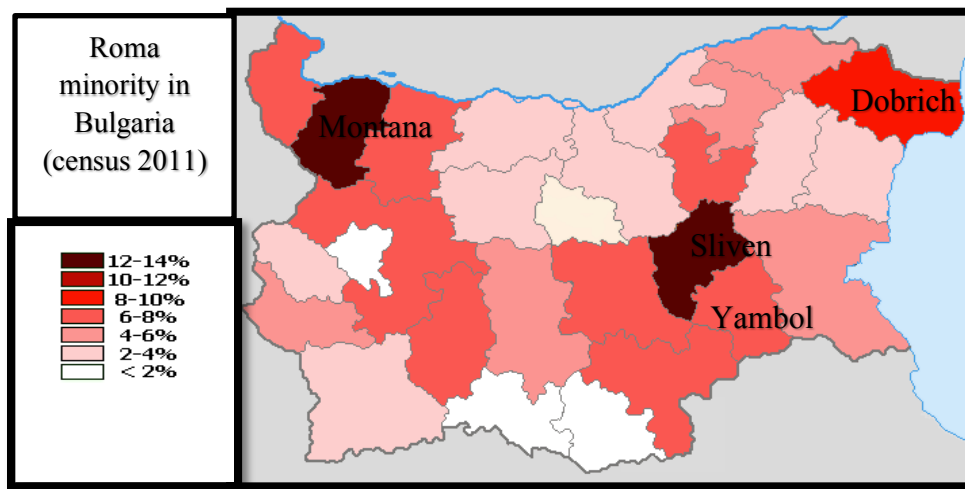
⁵⁴ National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, "2011 Population Census," 23.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Traditionally the Roma (Gypsies) have occupied the third highest ethnic population with 325,343 persons or 4.9 percent of those who responded to the question of ethnicity. This group has increased by 0.2 percent from the 2001 census.⁵⁷ Although the distribution of this ethnic group is evenly spread throughout all districts, there are a few zones with higher concentrations of Roma. These places are Montana (12.7 percent of the population), Sliven (11.8 percent), Dobrich (8.8 percent), and Yambol (8.5 percent). Figure 4 provides a visual breakdown of the Roma population in Bulgaria.

Figure 4. Roma minority in Bulgaria



Source: Wikipedia, "Romani people in Bulgaria," accessed July 20, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romani_people_in_Bulgaria

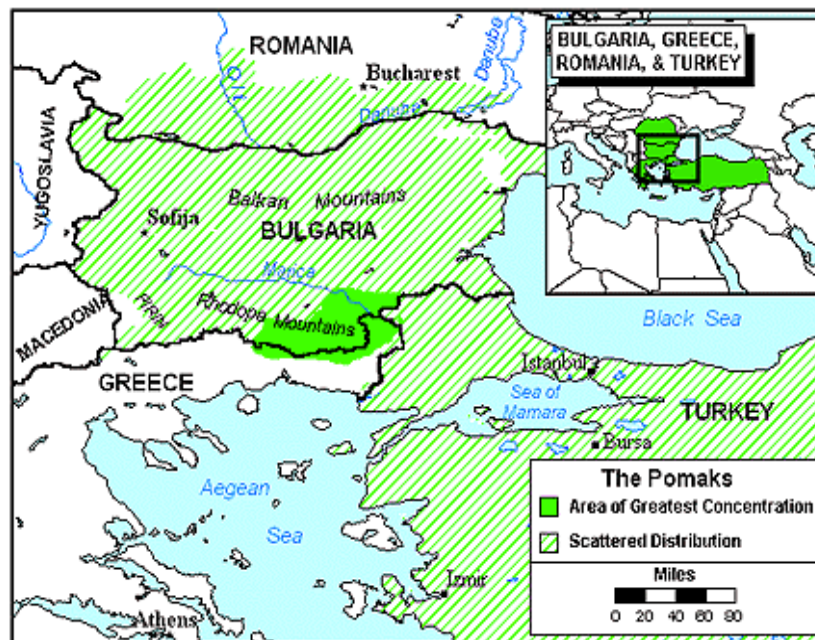
In the 2011 census, 53,391 or 0.8 percent of the people did not declare an ethnic affiliation. These people were mostly young and lived predominantly in big cities. Along with the other ethnic groups, Russians, Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Macedonians, Romanians, and Ukrainians collectively number 49,304 and make up 0.7 percent of the population of Bulgaria.

Unfortunately, no official census data for the number of Pomaks is presented. Even though a minority in Bulgaria, this group exists, and its population is significant for

⁵⁷ Ibid.

the purposes of this research, which by raw estimates from different sources is numbered at 68,000 or approximately 1 percent of Bulgaria's population.⁵⁸ However, this figure is not accurate, as Fatme Muyhtar asserts "due to lack of clear sense of self-identity."⁵⁹ For example, the Bulgarian Mohammedans may mark Turkish or Bulgarian as their ethnic affiliation, or just Muslim, because in the census papers there is no an appropriate column for their ethnic group. Even though census data on Bulgarian Muslims is scarce, it is well known that this ethnic group exists and that it has inhabited a compact zone on Bulgaria's southern border. Figure 5 provides an estimate of Pomak territory.

Figure 5. Pomak territory in Bulgaria



Source: Joshua Project, "Pomaks in Bulgaria," accessed July 23, 2015, http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14436/BU.

In addition to addressing ethnic distinctions, the Bulgarian national census also polls an individual's mother tongue and considers it to be the second most important ethno-demographic component surveyed in Bulgaria. Despite this, 9.8 percent of people

⁵⁸ National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, "2011 Population Census," 27; Joshua Project, accessed July 23, 2015, http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14436/BU.

⁵⁹ Muyhtar, *Human Rights of Muslims*.

did not answer the question in the 2011 census. The highest share of this percentage consisted of young people under 39 and children under nine. The Bulgarian language was voluntarily pointed out as the mother tongue by 85.2 percent, Turkish by 9.1 percent, and Roma by 4.2 percent of the population. The relationship between ethnic belonging and mother tongue is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of the Bulgarian population by ethnic group and mother tongue, as of January 2, 2011

	Mother Tongue					
Ethnic Group	Total	Bulgarian	Turkish	Roma	Other	Not stated
Total	6,611,513	5,631,759	604,246	280,979	47,071	47,458
Bulgarian	5,604,300	5,571,049	15,959	7,528	7,511	2,253
Turkish	585,024	18,975	564,858	549	87	555
Roma	320,761	24,033	21,440	272,710	1,905	673
Other	48,321	10,726	397	26	36,196	976
Not stated	53,107	6,976	1,592	166	1,372	43,001

Source: National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, “2011 Population Census,” 26. Individuals who answered both questions are included.

The results in Table 3 above show that the relationship between ethnicity and mother tongue was very strong. Therefore, language could be considered one of the most important factors in determining an ethnic group’s affiliation and boundaries.

1. Religious Demography

Even though the question about religion, interestingly enough, had the highest number of non-responders in the 2011 census—21.8 percent of the country’s 7,364,570 citizens—it is still worth reporting these numbers. The numbers of adherents in different religions in Bulgaria are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Religious groups in Bulgaria as of 2011

Group	Population	% of declared	% of total
Christians	4,489,271	77.9%	61%
Undeclared	1,606,269	-	21.8%
Areligious	682,162	11.8%	9.3%
Islam	577,139	10.0%	7.8%
Others	9,729	0.2%	0.1%

Source: National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, “2011 Population Census,” 26.

Christians compose the overwhelming majority of the country, and the highest share of Christians is Eastern Orthodox, which is 4,374,135 people or 76 percent of those who declared their faith. In addition to Eastern Orthodox, 48,945 people or 0.8 percent of those who answered described themselves as Catholic, and 64,476 people defined themselves as Protestants, or 1.1 percent.

Persons who consider themselves Muslims constituted 577,139 or 8 percent of the population. Of them, 546,004 are Sunni, and 27,407 are Shia. The other 3,727 people answered only Muslim, without specifying a denomination. As described above, the overwhelming majority of Muslims are Turk (8.8 percent), Pomak (1 percent) or Roma (0.9 percent). However, there is evidence to suggest that these numbers may be changing, particularly in light of the mass migration of Syrians, Iraqis, and even Afghans to Europe in response to the rise of ISIS and continued unrest in these countries. This is further discussed below.

2. Middle Eastern and Afghan Refugees

The terrible conflict in Syria, which started in 2011, has created a humanitarian and refugee crisis unseen since the Second World War. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that more than three million Syrians have fled their homes and become refugees since the start of the war.⁶⁰ Until 2015, Syria's neighbors, such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, have absorbed the bulk of this crisis.⁶¹ However, more recently, Europe has seen a massive influx of refugees from Syria and Iraq. The UNHCR asserts that asylum applications in the European Union (EU) increased in 2014 by 25 percent from 2013.⁶² According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as of the beginning of October 2015, 700,000 migrants have arrived in Europe; however the exact number is unclear, because some migrants have crossed borders undetected.⁶³ The EU has attempted to measure the influx of refugees through the number of asylum applications, depicted in Figure 6.

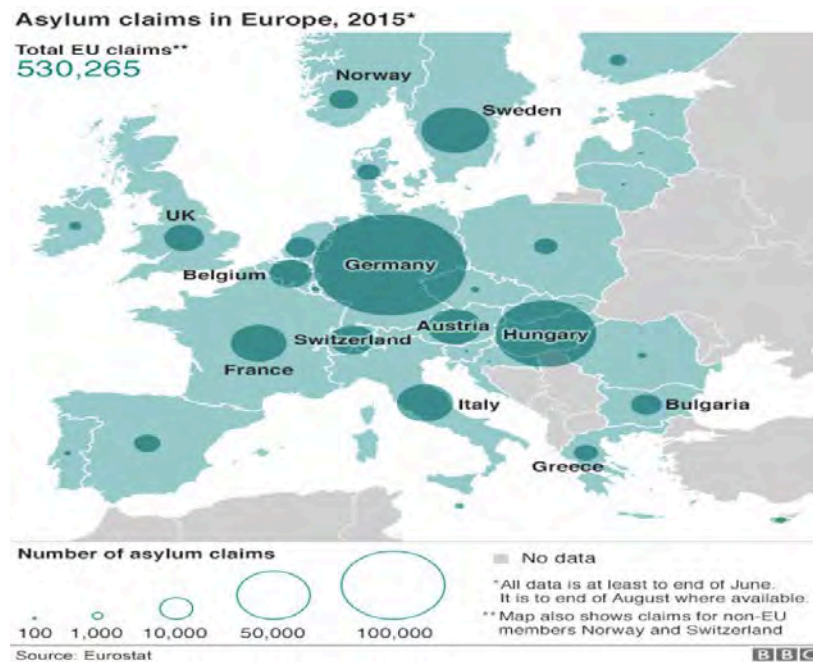
⁶⁰ Nicole Manie, Francisco Rico-Martinez, Varka Kalaydzhieva, "Syrian Refugees in Bulgaria: A Double Edged Sword," FCJ Refugee Center, accessed October 27, 2015, <http://www.fcjrefugeecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/AAAREPORT-WITH-FCJ-LOGO.doc.pdf>.

⁶¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Refuge & Hope in the Time of ISIS* (Washington, DC: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, January 2015), <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/upload/Refuge-and-Hope-in-the-Time-of-ISIS.pdf>.

⁶² UN Refugee Agency, "2015 UNHCR Subregional Operations Profile—Northern, Western, Central and Southern Europe," accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48db16.html>.

⁶³ "Migrant Crisis: Migration to Europe Explained in Graphics," BBC, November 9, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>.

Figure 6. Asylum claims in Europe, 2015



Source: “Migrant Crisis: Migration to Europe Explained in Graphics,” BBC, November 9, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>.

Bulgaria, as an EU member is one of Europe’s external borders, as well as historically one of the main routes between Europe and Asia. Bulgaria, however, as the poorest economy in the EU, has maintained a small-scale refugee protection program, and has processed approximately 1,000 asylum applications per year on average for the last decade. However, in 2013, the country’s refugee program was overwhelmed when it received between 7,000 and 10,000 applications, according to different sources, of which around 4,000 claimed to be Syrian.⁶⁴

The Bulgarian authorities answered the refugee challenge by increasing the number of border policemen and tightening border control.⁶⁵ As a result, illegal immigration dropped by 44 percent, between 2013 and 2014.⁶⁶ Although these results

⁶⁴ Ibid. Some sources say 10,000, and another, like the Bulgarian state agency for refugees, estimates 7,000. See also State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, accessed November 1, 2015, www.aref.government.bg/?cat=21.

⁶⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Refuge & Hope in the Time of ISIS*.

⁶⁶ Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, “Number of Illegal Immigrants Detained in 2014 Down by 44% from 2013,” March 6, 2015, <http://www.bta.bg/en/c/DF/id/1030131>.

were promising, the border police asserted that the number of detained illegal immigrants was more than 6,000, most of them Syrians (3,781), followed by Afghans (1,370), Iraqis (355), and Turks (102).⁶⁷ The numbers also show that more than 3,000 illegal immigrants attempted to leave Bulgaria undetected but were detained. This suggests that Bulgarian security forces, even with relative success, still could not properly handle the problem of illegal migration. Illegal migration was, in fact, named as one of the threats to Bulgaria in its National Security Strategy of 2011.⁶⁸

However, from 2014 until the present, Bulgaria has not been a preferred route for migrants for several reasons. First, as a member of the EU and signatory to the 2013 Dublin Convention, Bulgaria has to comply with strict requirements and procedures for asylum seekers. The Dublin Convention requires the first country of arrival to provide asylum seekers with protection, which means that even after acquiring asylum status and the right to travel freely throughout Europe, the migrant, if he decides to settle in another European country and apply for permanent asylum, he/she may be returned to the first country of arrival, in this case Bulgaria. As the poorest EU economy, Bulgaria does not provide many opportunities for the refugees to settle and improve their livelihood. Therefore, migrants aim to reach Western Europe, specifically Germany, and thus bypass Bulgaria. Second, Bulgaria has reached the bottom rating of preferred states in the “Arabic Handbook of the Refugee Candidate.”⁶⁹ This is most likely due to its weak economy and its lack of resources for migrants. This bottom rating has most likely made the country an undesirable location.

Despite all these reasons, according to official data for 2015, Bulgaria has 12,738 asylum applications so far and 11,000 more from the previous year.⁷⁰ The division of refugees by countries of origin is depicted in Figure 7. With the onset of the winter in

⁶⁷ State Agency for Refugees.

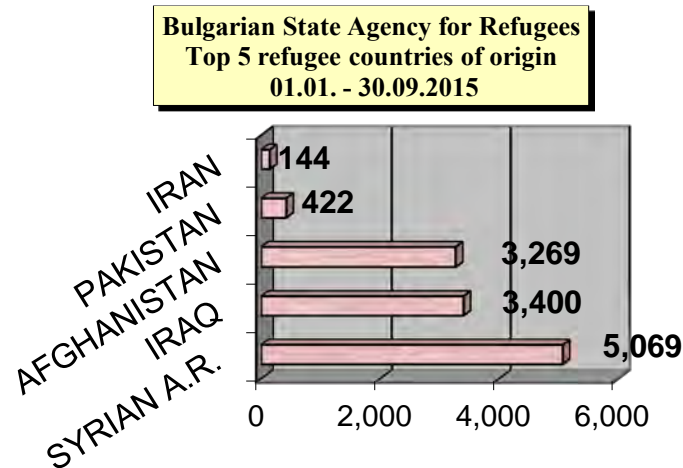
⁶⁸ Ministry of Defense, “Bulgarian NNS 2011,” accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.comd.bg/bg/content/strategiya-za-nacionalna-sigurnost-na-republika-blgariya>.

⁶⁹ *Standart News*, “Refugee Crisis: 10% More Afghans Arrive to Europe than Syrians, Bulgaria Is on the ‘Black List,’” October 19, 2015, http://www.standartnews.com/english/read/refugee_crisis_10_more_afghans_arrive_to_europe_than_syrians_bulgaria_is_on_the_black_list_-9829.html.

⁷⁰ State Agency for Refugees.

Europe, it may be that more refugees will choose the land route via Bulgaria rather than through rough seaways.

Figure 7. Refugees in Bulgaria



Source: State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.aref.government.bg/?cat=21>.

The Bulgarian public is not well informed about the real refugee situation that is taking place. Therefore, Bulgarians have little sympathy towards the refugees. Furthermore, Bulgarian nationalism tends not to support Muslims and fears their increasing numbers in the country. This was evident when the Bulgarian Orthodox Church called on the government to prevent the influx of Muslim refugees in the country.⁷¹ The head of the Orthodox Church, Patriarch Neofit, said, “Our government should in no way allow more refugees into our country.”⁷² Bulgarians may also feel threatened by the refugees because the country is experiencing a difficult economic situation and increasing strain on labor market.

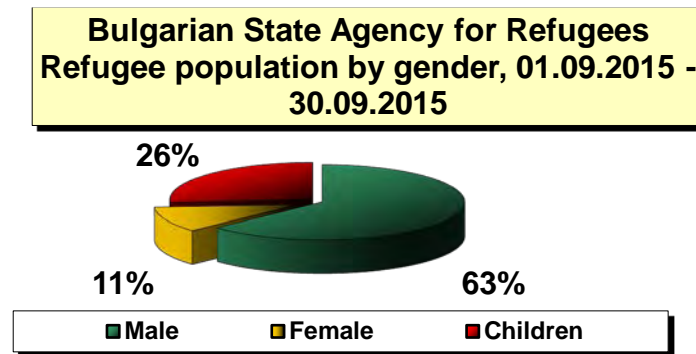
It is also worth noting that, of the refugees who have chosen to stay in Bulgaria, most of the refugees’ children do not attend Bulgarian schools. This is particularly

⁷¹ Middle East Eye, “Don’t Let Muslim Refugees In, Says Bulgaria’s Orthodox Church,” September 26, 2015, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/dont-let-muslim-refugees-says-bulgarias-orthodox-church-1024482681>.

⁷² Reuters, “Bulgarian Church Urges the Government to Stop Migrants,” September 25, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/25/us-europe-migrants-bulgaria-idUSKCN0RP1WH20150925>.

troubling given that children make up 26 percent of asylum seekers in the country. These statistics are captured in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Refugees in Bulgaria by age and gender



Source: State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.aref.government.bg/?cat=21>.

The extent to which these migrants, particularly those who choose to stay, could become a security threat to Bulgaria and a source of Islamically motivated terrorism is addressed in Chapter IV.

D. TERRORISM IN BULGARIA

This section highlights major acts of terrorism and violent unrest that have occurred in Bulgaria since World War II. Overall, there were no significant terrorist acts in Bulgaria until the late 1980s, when a series of violent clashes between ethnic Turks and Bulgarian security forces occurred, as well as terrorist acts. These confrontations were the result of policies aimed at forcing the “Bulgarization” of Turks and other minorities in the country. Following Bulgaria’s transition to democracy in 1991 and the creation of political parties for Turks and Roma, these violent clashes and terrorist acts largely stopped. Beginning in 2010, however, Bulgaria saw a new wave of terrorism that appears to be motivated by Islamic radicalism, including ISIS.

1. Terrorism from 1980 to 1989

Beginning in the 1980s, Bulgaria began to experience a series of ethnic clashes, including violent confrontations between its Muslim minority and the government. As previously mentioned, the Bulgarian Communist party unsuccessfully attempted to “Bulgarize” the entire population throughout its 45 years of rule, including restrictions on Turkish dress and the limited practice of Islam. This process came to its peak during 1984 and 1985 and the so-called “Revival Process,” which attempted the Bulgarization of names of Turks in the country. The Turkish language, religious practices and wearing traditional attire were all banned.⁷³ The result was unrest among the Turkish minority, which culminated in 1989 with public protests. The government reacted violently, and protesters clashed with police, causing several hundred casualties. Following these violent confrontations, approximately 350,000 Bulgarian Turks immigrated to Turkey. Later, roughly 150,000 returned to Bulgaria, while the others opted to stay in Turkey.⁷⁴

In addition to these violent confrontations between Turks in Bulgaria and the government, low-level terrorist acts began occurring in Bulgaria. These incidents were exclusively the acts of pro-Turkish extremist groups (PTEGs) that aimed to compel the Bulgarian communist party to abandon its Bulgarization policy. Specifically, 42 clandestine pro-Turkish groups were discovered having committed terrorist acts. Some members of these groups were ultimately convicted of sedition and planning or carrying out terrorism, bombings, and contact with Turkish agents in Bulgaria. According to the investigation of the State Security Agency, one group, code-named by the Agency “Abominable,” carried out numerous terrorist attacks. Abominable became particularly known for its ability to carry out two terrorist attacks simultaneously in different parts of the country, in what could be called a terrorist offensive campaign.⁷⁵

⁷³ Antonina Zhelyazkova, “The Bulgarian Ethnic Model,” *East European Constitutional Review* 10, no. 4 (2001), <http://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/eurcr10&div=37&id=&page=>.

⁷⁴ Tumblr, “Assimilation of Bulgaria’s Turkish Minority,” accessed September 30, 2015, <http://assimilation-of-turks-in-bg.tumblr.com/>.

⁷⁵ Stefan Tashev, “30 Years of Attacks in Plovdiv, Varna and Bunovo—How The ‘Abominable’ Blew Bulgaria,” *Unitary Bulgaria*, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.celokupnabulgaria.eu/?p=9071>.

Figure 9. PTEG members who were found guilty for Bunovo train station bombing



Source: Desant, "The Faces and the Fate of Assassins," March 9, 2013, <http://www.desant.net/show-news/26758/>.

During the Revival Process, the most notorious attacks between 1984 and 1989 were conducted by PTEGs on the train station in Plovdiv in 1984, followed by another attack one hour later at the Varna airport. In 1985, a train was bombed when passing the village of Bunovo, and in the same year a bomb was placed in a hotel in the town of Sliven.⁷⁶ These coordinated terrorist attacks, followed by successive attacks, are unusual in Bulgaria. These acts are summarized in Table 5.

⁷⁶ *Dnes.bg*. "The Attacks in Bulgaria since the Beginning of the 20th Century to Today," July 19, 2012, <http://www.dnes.bg/bulgaria/2012/07/19/atentatite-v-byulgariia-ot-nachaloto-na-20-vek-do-dnes.164276>.

Table 5. Terrorist activities in Bulgaria, 1983–1989

Year	Group	Actions
1983	PTEGs	Blackmailing the government
1983	PTEGs	Forest fire—750 acres of forest burned, propaganda
1983	PTEGs	Unsuccessful attempt to sabotage railway transport network
1984	PTEGs	Blackmailing the government
1984	PTEGs	Bomb explosions at Plovdiv train station and Varna Airport
1984	PTEGs	Bomb explosions in Benkovski Church
1984	PTEGs	Unsuccessful attempt to sabotage Aytos train station
1985	PTEGs	Bomb explosions at Bunovo train station
1985	PTEGs	Hotel bomb explosions in Sliven
1985	PTEGs	Supermarket bomb explosions in Burgas
1985	PTEGs	IED activated at a children's playground
1985	PTEGs	Unsuccessful attempt to sabotage Karnobat train station
1986	PTEGs	Unsuccessful IED in Druzba hotel, Varna
1986	PTEGs	Poisoning of water installations, Lyulyakovo village, propaganda
1987	PTEGs	Kidnapping of two children

During the five years of the campaign for forced renaming of Bulgarian Turks, a total of 29 people were killed—a woman in the bombing of the station in Plovdiv; eight protesters (including a baby) in the campaign period from December 24, 1984, to January 19, 1985; seven people (including two children) in the bombing of the Bunovo train station; three in November 1988 and nine protesters and soldiers from May 19–27, 1989.

At the end of 1989, the government issued a decree that proclaimed the restoration of the names of Bulgarian Turks. In the following months, the government also adopted a series of measures to help with their reincorporation into Bulgarian society. These gestures were the beginning of the “Bulgarian Ethnic Model,” which was designed to prevent ethnic clashes in the future. As professor Anna Krasteva describes, “The Bulgarian ethnic model was the most successful political product of Bulgarian fragile democracy.”⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Anna Krasteva, “Post-Communist Discovery of Immigration: The Case of Bulgaria,” *SEER—South-East Europe Review for Labour and Social Affairs*, issue 02/2006, 32, <http://www.ceeol.com/>.

2. Terrorism in Bulgaria from 1989 to the Present

Following Bulgaria's independence from the Soviet Union in 1989, and especially throughout the early 1990s, Bulgaria faced constant political instability and strikes. The old Communist party still exercised a powerful influence. Compounding this political instability, "there was little tangible progress with economic reform."⁷⁸

However, some important developments led to a reduction in ethnic clashes and terrorism. In 1990, the Turks created their own political party, the opposition movement of Bulgarian Turks—the MRF—and Ahmed Dogan was elected as its leader.⁷⁹ Some of the Parliament members from the United Democratic Forces Party made an appeal to the Constitutional Court of Bulgaria, claiming that the MRF was unconstitutional according to Bulgarian law, specifically in regard to the following articles:

1. Article 11.4 of the Constitution prohibits formation of the parties based on ethnic, religious and racial line.
2. It grants equal rights to all Bulgarian citizens with no privileges on grounds of race, nationality, ethnic self-identification, religion, sex etc.
3. It prescribes the obligatory studying and usage of Bulgarian language, but at the same time it grants the right to all to study and use their own mother tongue alongside Bulgarian (Art.36).
4. It guarantees the right of all Bulgarian citizens to develop their own national culture (Art. 54).⁸⁰

However, despite these concerns, Bulgaria's Constitutional Court approved the MRF, and it became a legitimate part of the Bulgarian political scene. The MRF claims to be open to all the citizens of Bulgaria.⁸¹ The Roma also founded their own party in 1998, called Euroroma. It has a mixed membership, and its leader is Cvetelin Kanchev.⁸²

⁷⁸ BBC, "Bulgaria Country Profile—Overview," April 16, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17202996>.

⁷⁹ Marushiakova and Popov, "Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria," 28.

⁸⁰ Republic of Bulgaria, "Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria," accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.vks.bg/english/vksen_p04_01.htm.

⁸¹ Movement for Rights and Freedoms, accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.dps.bg/about/regulations.aspx>.

⁸² Political Movement Euroroma, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.euroroma-bg.org/myindex.html>.

Despite the progress made in reducing ethnic tensions in Bulgaria, the country still experienced a series of terrorist attacks. The worst attack was thwarted before it was executed. In December 1990, law enforcement received intelligence that three hotels in Sofia—the Sheraton, the Interpred, the New Omni—and the U.S. Embassy had been targeted for an attack. Ten terrorists from five different countries were detained in the Grand Hotel Sofia shortly before their planned actions.⁸³

Of the attacks that occurred, several were particularly damaging. On July 9, 1995, a bomb exploded in front of *Maritza* magazine in Plovdiv. Several business offices were destroyed; the damage, however, was only material because the explosion occurred at midnight when nobody was there. On July 17, 1996, a bomb went off at the shopping center in Sofia, which caused significant material damage to 15 shops, without victims or casualties. Neither of these attacks, however, was religiously motivated.

One act, though, was clearly perpetrated on behalf of religious motives. On December 6, 1996, an IED exploded in the porch of the Grand Mosque in Kazanlak, with no casualties. This is the only attack during this timeframe that is believed to have been religiously motivated, but it was directed *against* the Muslim minority in Bulgaria, not perpetrated by them. These terrorist acts are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Terrorist activities in Bulgaria, 1989–2004

Year	Group	Actions
1991	Unknown	International terrorists captured before blowing up three hotels in Sofia
1995	Unknown	Bomb explosion in the building of <i>Maritza</i> magazine, Plovdiv
1996	Unknown	Bomb explosion in the market center, Sofia
1996	Unknown	Bomb explosion in the Grand Mosque
1997	Unknown	IED found close to the airport
1998	Unknown	Bomb explosion in the building of <i>Trud</i> newspaper office

⁸³ *Dnes.bg*, “Attacks in Bulgaria.”

From 1998 to the present, Bulgaria has seen an increase in the number of religiously motivated terrorist acts. One of the first incidents occurred on July 18, 2012, when a bus carrying 42 Israelis was attacked by three terrorists, killing five Israelis, as well as a Bulgarian citizen, and injuring 32 others. No organization publicly claimed responsibility for the attack.⁸⁴ However, it is believed that the perpetrators, who were carrying Canadian and Lebanese passports, were affiliated with the Lebanese Hizbollah.

In 2013, another incident occurred at the National Palace in Sofia. The MRF conducted a political conference, and during the speech of the movement's leader, Ahmed Dogan, a young man of Turkish ethnicity, Oktay Enimehmedov, stormed the stage and pointed a gun at Dogan. The weapon misfired, and the leader had time to react and "hit the would-be assassins hand out of the way."⁸⁵ Before Enimehmedov could try a second shot, security guards and some of the delegates succeeded in tackling the assassin. It is still unknown what his motives were.⁸⁶

Figure 10. The unsuccessful attack on Ahmed Dogan



Source: "Failed Assassination Attempt on Ahmed Dogan," *YouTube*, accessed August 30, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBd6ptb7-QA>

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports: Europe Overview," In *Country Reports on Terrorism 2012*, May 30, 2013, accessed December 20, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2012/209981.htm>

⁸⁵ *Internet Newspaper For Young Nigerians*, "Heartstopping: An Attempted Assassination of a Politician Happens Live on Stage," January 19, 2013, <http://ynaija.com/heartstopping-moment-when-an-attempted-assassination-of-an-opposition-politician-happened-live-on-stage-watch-graphic-images/>.

⁸⁶ "Assassination Attempt against Bulgarian Politician Ahmed Dogan," video, PCASP Network, accessed August 30, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vr1Ak3TSoQk>.

However, the most recent incident of potential terrorism is also the most troubling. In November 2014, a cell loyal to ISIS was discovered. *Reuters* announced, “Bulgaria charges Imam, six others with supporting ISIS.”⁸⁷ Specifically, the Bulgarian Imam, Ahmed Musa Ahmed, was detained by security forces and charged with supporting ISIS. The Imam was a former Christian of Roma descent, but he converted to Islam in 2000 and was teaching the ideas of radical Islam. Bulgarian security forces raided more than 40 homes and a mosque as part of this overall operation. There they found books, computers, and propaganda with the logo of the Islamic State. Ahmed Musa was sentenced to one year in prison for promoting a “radical ideology in mosques, conferences and cafes between March 2008 and October 2010.”⁸⁸ In addition, Musa was given an additional three year term for violating the terms of his probation from a previous sentence for spreading radical Islam. Despite this, he has “remained free pending an appeal.”⁸⁹ Additionally, 26 people were held and 30 witnesses questioned. These acts are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Terrorist activities in Bulgaria, 2004–2015

Year	Group	Actions
2012	Hezbollah	Attacked Israeli tourist bus at Sarafovo Airport
2013	Lone Wolf	Assassination attempt on Dogan
2014	ISIS	12 imams detained for radicalism

This last incident demonstrates that Bulgaria has entered a new era in terrorist activity. Whereas previous acts were partially the result of government policies targeting Turkish minorities in the country, and possibly Turkish involvement in Bulgaria, these

⁸⁷ *Reuters*, “Bulgaria Charges Imam, Six Others With Supporting ISIS,” *Newsweek*, November 26, 2014, <http://www.newsweek.com/bulgaria-charges-imam-six-others-supporting-isis-287414>.

⁸⁸ “Bulgarian mosque raided in jihad incitement probe,” *PMnews*, November 25, 2014, accessed December 20, 2014, <http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2014/11/25/bulgarian-mosque-raided-in-jihad-incitement-probe/>.

⁸⁹ “Bulgarian Mosque Raided in Jihad Incitement Probe,” *Ahramonline*, November 25, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/116426/World/International/Bulgarian-mosque-raided-in-jihad-incitement-probe.aspx>.

recent attacks came from Arab influences, and in the 2014 raid, individuals were believed to be connected with the Islamic State.

Alongside these developments, there is evidence to suggest that money from Arab countries, particularly countries in the Arabian Peninsula, is being sent to Muslim groups inside Bulgaria. As Kristen Ghodsee asserts in her field study on Bulgarian Muslims in 2004–2005, since 1989 there was a “tsunami of foreign aid” from Western as well as Middle Eastern NGOs into the Balkan countries with Muslim populations.⁹⁰ Specifically, she believes that Bulgarian Muslims sought help from foreign Islamic foundations and NGOs to offset poor economic conditions in the country.

One example comes from 1996, when the Bulgarian deputy prime minister and the chairman of the Supreme Theological Council of Muslims in Bulgaria met with representatives of the Muslim World League in order to discuss a “possibility of closer relations between Saudi Arabia and Bulgaria.”⁹¹ Because there is no effective regulation and control of foreign aid and donations in Bulgaria, it is difficult to estimate the exact amount of NGO aid coming to Bulgaria. However, the Pomaknews Agency claims that currently “there are three legally registered Islamic NGOs,” which are active in Bulgaria.⁹² The first NGO is Taiba, which is funded by donations from Saudi Arabia. The organization was registered in 1995, and it was a “successor to two NGOs (Dar al-Irshad and Al Waqf al-Islamiyya).”⁹³ Bulgarian Security Services’ reports indicate that this organization has had links to extremist groups in the Middle East. The second NGO, called Neduwa, was registered in 1994 and also has close relations to Saudi Arabia.⁹⁴ The third NGO, Al-Waqf al-Islamiyya, was banned in 1994 and then permitted to “re-register in Bulgaria in 2002 under the terms of a new law on religions.”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Kristen Ghodsee, “Examining ‘Eastern’ Aid: Muslim Minorities and Islamic Foundations in Bulgaria,” *The Anthropology of East Europe Review: Central Europe, Eastern Europe And Euroasia* 23, no. 2 (2005), <http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/aeer/article/view/1137>.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Pomaknews Agency, “Wikileaks: Islam in Bulgaria,” accessed November 5, 2015, <http://pomaknews.com/en/?p=244>.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Even though detailed information about activities of informal Islamic NGOs is difficult to find, the evidence shows that the emergence of new mosques, religious schools, and the publication of Islamic magazines are activities sponsored by outside sources. These organizations may be attempting to change moderate religious views of Bulgarian Muslims.

Focusing specifically on these points, there are scholars who argue, to differing degrees, that radical Islam is a threat to state security. Alex Alexiev, for example, argues that the biggest threat to Bulgaria comes from its neighbor, Turkey.⁹⁶ He asserts, “The grand geopolitical scheme of the AKP (Justice and Development Party), known as ‘Neo-Ottomanism,’”⁹⁷ is based on the radicalization of Muslim minorities in neighboring countries such as Bulgaria. Another supporter of this idea is Konstantin Chakarov, who talks about a secret Turkish plan during the Cold War named “Gladis,” which included creating sleeper cells of ethnic Turks in Bulgaria to destabilize the country through violence acts.⁹⁸

Ali Bulac, a Turkish journalist, counters that Alex Alexiev interprets the facts to suit his argument. Bulac writes that neither Muslims nor the Turkish president Erdogan is a threat to Bulgaria’s government. Bulac argues that Alexiev is trying to influence U.S. and European audiences by presenting Erdogan as against secular democracy and possessing a secret agenda for the Islamization of Turkey. Bulac further notes that Alexiev does not mention the Muslims in Bulgaria as part of the problem because of his Bulgarian origin. Also, he denies Alexiev’s claim that the number of mosques in Bulgaria has increased because of external funding from radical sources. Instead, he argues that the increase in mosques is due to the growing Bulgarian Muslim population.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Alexiev, “The End of Erdogan’s Islamization.”

⁹⁷ Alex Alexiev, “Turkey: NATO’s ‘Open Prison,’” *National Review Online*, January 18, 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/288343/turkey-nato-s-open-prison-alex-alexiev>.

⁹⁸ Adelina Deliiska, “Turkey Built Network as Al Qaida in Our Country,” *Novinar*, November 12, 2008, http://www.novinar.bg/news/kostadin-chakarov-turtciia-gradeshe-mrezha-kato-al-kajda-u-nas_Mjc5ODszMg==.html. Konstantin Chakarov is a former political advisor of Bulgarian communist leader.

⁹⁹ Ali Bulac, “Alexiev’s Doctrine,” *Today’s Zaman*, August 7, 2007, http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/ali-bulac/alexievs-doctrine_118672.html.

By contrast, Valeri Ratchev argues that the biggest threat comes from Bulgaria's security posture. Specifically, there is a technological gap and an old security paradigm in the Bulgarian Security Services, which is preventing the state from preparing for domestic and international threats.¹⁰⁰ He notes that the capabilities of the security sector are overestimated and that politicians and the wider society are unaware of this capabilities gap. The reduced budgets of the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense demonstrate that the Bulgarian government does not recognize a serious threat to the country.¹⁰¹ Instead, Bulgarians rely largely on their NATO allies to protect them.

However, there is reason to believe that Bulgaria's security is under threat. For example, the central news channel, NOVATV, announced on October 25, 2014, that there is evidence that ISIS has at least 40 Bulgarian members.¹⁰² The Bulgarian minister of defense verified this information and asked for an emergency meeting of the Security Council to discuss and analyze the threat posed by ISIS.¹⁰³ In November 2014, the news agency *Reuters* described the story of a Bulgarian Imam, Ahmed Musa Ahmed, who had been detained by security forces and charged with supporting the Islamic State.¹⁰⁴ These reports suggest that Bulgaria, like many other countries, faces potential security threats posed by the rise of radical Islam, and ISIS in particular.

All of these points are further used to analyze Bulgaria's threat from Islamic extremism in Chapter IV.

¹⁰⁰ Valeri Ratchev, "The Growing Threat: Homeland Security Issues of Bulgaria," 2005, http://procon.bg/system/files/17.05_Ratchev.pdf.

¹⁰¹ Program for the Development of the Defense Capabilities of the Bulgarian Armed Forces 2020, approved by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, October 3, 2014, http://www.md.government.bg/bg/doc/programi/20141009_Natsionalna_programa_2020.pdf.

¹⁰² Nikolai Vasilkovski, "Bulgarians Fight for ISIS in Syria and Iraq," *Novanews*, October 30, 2014, <http://novanews.bg/news/view/2014/10/30/91029/>.

¹⁰³ Nikolai Vasilkovski, "Minister: ISIS Is a Threat for Our National Security," *Novanews*, October 30, 2014, <http://novanews.bg/news/view/2014/11/03/91385>.

¹⁰⁴ *Reuters*, "Bulgaria Charges Imam."

E. CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the history of the Bulgarian state with the aim of understanding the emergence of its Muslim minority, along with the changes in terrorist acts and perpetrators over time. In doing so, this chapter has highlighted the recent rise of terrorist groups and acts affiliated with Arabs and the Islamic State.

The next chapter offers suggestions for Bulgarian security forces to use this model and what intelligence to look for as the country continues to struggle with the rise of Islamically motivated terrorism.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. APPLYING THE REMM MODEL TO ASSESS FUTURE ISLAMIC THREATS IN BULGARIA

This thesis began by providing a brief overview of Bulgaria, particularly the historical events that created the country's religious and ethnic diversity and its Muslim minority in particular. Chapter II provided a brief overview of key literature on religiously motivated violence. It focused specifically on fundamentalism theory and Gregg's conditions that lead to interpretations that call for religiously motivated violence. From this literature review, the chapter presented a basic model of radicalization and terrorism. The model focused on four variables in particular: the creation of groups, which consist of leaders and followers; intentions, especially radical interpretations of a faith that call for violence; the acquisition of capabilities that can lead to violence; and the selection of targets for terrorist acts. Chapter III then discussed the contemporary religious and ethnic demographics of Bulgaria, in addition to highlighting major violent acts in Bulgaria from 1980 to the present.

This chapter takes the above model and uses it to assess the potential threat to Bulgaria from Islamically motivated terrorism. In particular, it aims to answer the following questions: First, how vulnerable are Bulgaria's Muslim minority groups to radicalization? Are there leaders in Bulgaria who pose a threat by forming radical groups? Second, what are the intentions of Bulgaria's Muslim minorities? Do they have violent intentions towards the government? Third, what are the capabilities of Bulgaria's Muslim minorities? Do they possess the capabilities to engage in terrorist activities? Fourth, what may be the potential targets of Islamic terrorists based on the target selection of terrorist groups in the past? Each of these questions is addressed below, focusing on the key variables of the REMM model.

1. Bulgaria's Muslim Minority Groups

Bulgaria's Muslim minority groups have experienced systematic discrimination and marginalization from the Bulgarian government and society in the past. As described

in Chapter II, during the 45 years of Communist rule, Muslim minorities in Bulgaria were exposed to a constant and forceful assimilation campaign. The narrative that supported this campaign was that there was no Turkish ethnicity, but “Turkicized” Bulgarians, which justified the Communist party’s policy of Bulgarization. The end of the Cold War and the introduction of democracy saw the end of oppressive policies toward Muslim minorities in Bulgaria. Moreover, ethnic Turks and the Roma both created political parties to address their grievances through the political system. This combination of changed policies and the end of systematic discrimination of these groups, coupled with political representation, appears to have reduced ethnic tensions among these groups in Bulgaria.

However, social inequality and isolation of ethnic Turkish groups and Bulgarian Muslims (Roma and Pomaks) remain concerns. In some regions of Bulgaria, in Kardzhali, for example, the Turkish population is Muslim and currently has poor access to both resources and information. In these communities, the access to information occurs largely in the local mosque, which is often built with money from foreign charities, possibly creating the conditions for foreign influence among these groups. Furthermore, a Bulgarian think tank reports that some of these groups have satellite access to Turkish television, further presenting the opportunity for foreign influence.¹⁰⁵

Bulgarian Mohammedans—the Pomaks—are another marginalized population. As described in Chapter II, the Bulgarian government does not officially recognize this ethnic group, even though it constitutes around 1 percent of the population and occupies territory in three Balkan states, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. The Pomaks, subjected to an even worse assimilation campaign than ethnic Turks in the 1980s, are concentrated in specific region next to Bulgaria’s southern border, known as the Rhodope Mountain. This ethnic group’s proximity to the border may make it susceptible to foreign influence, particularly those Pomaks in other countries, including Turkey.

¹⁰⁵ Bulgarian Science Academy, Institute for Philosophical Researches, “Risks to Bulgaria from Islamic Fundamentalism and Terrorism,” 2005, http://old-philosophy.issk-bas.org/books/Riskove_zh_BG_islam_fundamentalism.htm.

Perhaps even greater than the ethnic Turks and Pomaks is the marginalization of Roma Muslims in Bulgaria, who live in large ghettos, primarily in the capital. According to a World Bank survey, Roma are more than 10 times poorer than ethnic Bulgarians, and their marginalization increases.¹⁰⁶ Huge masses of Roma people have no work and are, therefore, susceptible to influence of individuals and groups that offer resources. There is evidence to suggest that religious groups, both Christian Protestant sects and Islamic groups, are targeting the Roma.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Wikileaks revealed U.S. concerns that, as some of the poorest and most marginalized of Bulgaria's population, the Roma in the region are susceptible to influence by various Islamic charities, which could help different radical forces penetrate the region.¹⁰⁸

Alongside Bulgaria's Muslim minorities, the growing number of Muslim migrants to Bulgaria forms another potential threat source for Islamically motivated terrorism. This includes, particularly, Syrians, Iraqis, and even Afghans.¹⁰⁹ Most recently, in November 2015, Bulgarian security forces shot dead an Afghan migrant trying to cross the border from Turkey into Bulgaria. This migrant was part of an illegal group of 54 men ranging from 20 to 30 years old. It is believed that this all-male group of military-aged men may have had nefarious intentions.¹¹⁰

Leaders are also an important consideration and necessary component for the rise of Islamic groups and terrorist acts. With the rise of transnational terrorism, educated intellectuals have played a particularly important spiritual and political role, especially towards poor and marginalized populations. Huntington notes, for example, that a significant part of the university aged youth in Islamic countries are scientists, technical engineers, scholars, and lawyers. In many radicalizing communities, the elderly are not

¹⁰⁶ Dena Ringold, Mitchell Orenstein, and Erika Wilkens, *Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2005), xiv, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTROMA/Resources/roma_in_expanding_europe.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ Bulgarian Science Academy, Institute for Philosophical Researches, "Risks to Bulgaria."

¹⁰⁸ Pomaknews Agency, "Wikileaks: Islam in Bulgaria."

¹⁰⁹ Standart News, "Refugee Crisis."

¹¹⁰ "Afghan Refugee Shot Dead Trying to Enter Bulgaria," Aljazeera, October 16, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/afghan-refugee-shot-dead-enter-bulgaria-151016072352279.html>.

the most zealous but, rather, it is the young people.¹¹¹ Thus, young and educated Islamists play an important role in creating ideologues by importing radical ideas among the masses, by distributing significant numbers of publications, and by creating powerful organizations that use the most modern methods of propaganda and asymmetrical warfare.¹¹²

In Bulgaria, Muslim elites have historically been associated with a strong secular tradition. However, Bulgarian Muslims are now going abroad to study in universities in the Middle East or Turkey.¹¹³ In these universities, they could be exposed to the influence of radical ideas, and thus become radicalized, which could turn them into leaders of violent Islamic groups in Bulgaria. It is not clear if the Bulgarian government is keeping track of individuals who go to religious schools abroad in order to identify what they are learning or what their intentions are when they return.

Given this discussion, the Bulgarian government and security forces should be looking at the following:

- Disfranchised Muslim Roma and Pomak minorities, particularly those who are receiving money and other resources from foreign Islamic charities.
- Migrants and refugees who are also receiving aid from Islamic charities.
- Individuals who have gone abroad to Islamic schools for higher education.
- Foreign NGOs, particularly Islamic charities.

2. Intentions

Building on these points, several external influences could be shaping the intentions of Bulgaria's Muslim minority. As described in Chapter II, a 2014 raid revealed that ISIS was present in Bulgaria and is working with the local population, particularly Roma Muslim communities. This case suggests that Bulgaria, like many

¹¹¹ Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 2004), 444.

¹¹² Bulgarian Science Academy, Institute for Philosophical Researches, "Risks to Bulgaria."

¹¹³ Ibid.

other countries, is facing potential security threats posed by the rise of radical Islam, and ISIS in particular.

Perhaps ISIS' rigorous propaganda campaign poses the greatest threat to Bulgaria. As stated, ISIS has placed Bulgaria within its sights and named it as part of the Caliphate. Furthermore, as suggested by the 2014 raid, it is evident that ISIS already has leaders and followers in the country. Clearly, ISIS has demonstrated that it has violent intentions—against governments, minorities, and co-religionists who do not subscribe to their interpretation of Islam. The presence of ISIS in Bulgaria, therefore, shows that Islamic groups with violent intentions are in the country.

In addition to ISIS, several scholars suggest that Turkey may be a source of radicalization. As described in Chapter II, the expert Alex Alexiev argues that the biggest threat to Bulgaria stems from Turkey's attempts to influence the Bulgarian Muslim minorities, particularly those following the rise of Erdogan's Islamically-based party. Alexiev argues that Turkey aims to implement "the grand geopolitical scheme of the AKP (Justice and Development Party), known as 'Neo-Ottomanism.'"¹¹⁴ However, others suggest that Alexiev's ideas are overblown and when compared to groups like ISIS, not the biggest threat of Islamic terrorism that Bulgaria faces.

Also important to the discussion of intentions is the rise of Islamic schools in Bulgaria. There is evidence to suggest that several of Bulgaria's Muslim minority groups, including refugees, are either not attending Bulgarian public schools, or are not adequately learning in them. Currently about 2 percent of the population in Bulgaria is illiterate.¹¹⁵ Among the vulnerable areas are Turkish neighborhoods and villages, where children up to fourth grade cannot learn to read or write in Bulgarian. Alongside this trend is the rise of Islamic schools. In Bulgaria, there are currently three registered Muslim middle schools—in Shumen, in Momchilgrad, and in Ruse—and the Ministry of Education has approved their programs. In these schools, Bulgarian Muslims study Islam and are trained as Imams. However, alongside these schools, at least several Islamic

¹¹⁴ Alexiev, "The End of Erdogan's Islamization"; Alexiev, "Turkey: NATO's 'Open Prison.'"

¹¹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Bulgaria," accessed October 15, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>.

schools not registered and outside the control of the state exist.¹¹⁶ Marginalized groups in Bulgaria, particularly the Roma, may find these schools inviting, especially because Roma are not well integrated in public schools and more importantly, because they provide free education, food, shelter and clothing, which attract families who have no other prospects for their children. In many cases, Imams are the instructors, and no one controls how they interpret the Quran to children. In these schools, girls are veiled in typical Arabic style, which is unusual for Muslims in any part of Bulgaria. Therefore, there is growing concern that these schools are creating fundamentalists. Moreover, graduates of these schools are often sent to Arab countries to continue their education. Thus, there is concern that traditional and moderate Islam in Bulgaria is being replaced by versions coming from the Middle East, which are much more radical.¹¹⁷

Given this discussion, the Bulgarian government and security forces should undertake the following actions to monitor fundamentalist intentions within its borders.

- Monitor religious schools, including the identification of who is teaching there and what is being taught.
- Improve the database for Bulgarian citizens who study abroad in religious universities.
- Monitor religious publications and broadcasts for ISIS inspired messages.
- Put more effort into enforcing compulsory education for minorities, especially the Roma, in public schools.
- Invest more time and resources to determine the grievances of Muslim minorities, in order to prevent violent intentions against the government and other ethnic groups.
- Take note of the veiling of females and the adoption of similar conservative Muslim attire for men not typical of Bulgaria's Muslim minority.

¹¹⁶ Bulgarian Science Academy, Institute for Philosophical Researches, "Risks to Bulgaria."

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

3. Capabilities

Bulgaria has several challenges to controlling the capabilities of potential Islamic terrorists within its borders. First, the lack of sufficient control over the country's "gray" economy, along with high levels of crime, and the presence of organized cross-border criminal groups could lead to cooperation between individuals and organizations for the purposes of terrorism. Furthermore, this environment allows groups with violent intentions to easily acquire materials and human resources.

In addition to organized crime, Bulgaria also faces a potential threat from Islamic charities, as previously stated. Not only do these charities come with ideas and influence, but they also often have resources. In particular, some Islamic NGOs provide needed resources to poor local Muslim communities, including food and clothing. However, they also are building mosques and paying money to women who veil.¹¹⁸ It is strongly believed that charities that provide humanitarian assistance and money increase their influence with that target population.¹¹⁹ This influence could potentially lead to violence done in the name of a group.

Given this discussion, Bulgarian security forces should focus their efforts on the following:

- Monitoring criminal groups and smugglers for the influx of weapons that could be used for terrorist activities.
- Identifying vulnerabilities of the Muslim minorities in the country and addressing these vulnerabilities as best as possible, particularly groups that lack basic resources.

4. Targeting

The last and very important variable in the REMM model is targeting. Having all these favorable conditions for the existence of radical groups in Bulgaria, such groups have to determine where to channel their violence. There are many important strategic

¹¹⁸ Kristen Ghodsee, "Minarets and Miniskirts: Debating Islamic Dress in Contemporary Bulgaria," NCEEER, March 5, 2008, http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/2008_821-01h_Ghodsee.pdf.

¹¹⁹ Alexis Grynkeiwich, "Welfare as Warfare: How Violent Non-State Groups Use Social Services to Attack the State," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, volume 31, issue 4, (April 10, 2008), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10576100801931321>.

targets in Bulgaria. For example, the country has a nuclear power plant, called Kozlodui, located in the northwestern part of the country. This site could be a target for Muslim groups that wish to cause significant harm and possibly create apocalyptic conditions. Another strategic target could be an oil refinery in the sea town of Burgas. If this site were targeted, it would cripple Bulgarian society and its economy by causing a significant shortage of oil in the country.

However, perhaps the most likely target of Islamic terrorists would be one of Bulgaria's most prize resources. Because of its geographical location, Bulgaria has four beautiful seasons, which makes the country a preferred tourist destination. For example, many tourists travel to the Black Sea resorts from Western countries such as the United Kingdom, as well as from Russia and Romania, year-round. British tourists, in particular, travel to Bulgaria's winter resorts, especially its ski resorts. In recent years, Bulgaria has hosted several World and European Cup ski races, which attract additional tourists from all over the world.¹²⁰

Tourist sights are especially soft targets for terrorists; they offer several effects at once. For example, as described in Chapter II, a suicide bomber targeted a busload of Israeli tourists that was believed to be connected to the Lebanese Hizbollah.¹²¹ This incident greatly embarrassed Bulgarian security forces, who were unable to prevent the attack and also injured Bulgaria's tourism industry.

Furthermore, ISIS sympathizers have demonstrated the ability to target tourist destinations. In March 2015, for example, militants killed 22 tourists by attacking a museum in Tunisia's capital. In June 2015, a second attack took place on Sousse beach in a Tunisian resort, which killed 39, again mainly foreign tourists.¹²² More recently, ISIS

¹²⁰ Fédération Internationale de Ski, Internationaler Ski Verband (FIS), "Alpine Skiing World Cup," accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.fis-ski.com/alpine-skiing/events-and-places/event=34981/race=78960/>.

¹²¹ U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2012."

¹²² BBC, "Tunisia Attack on Sousse Beach 'Kills 39,'" June 27, 2015, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33287978>.

took credit for a plane crash in the Sinai Peninsula in October 2015 that killed 224.¹²³ Whether or not it is true, the effect was to chase tourists out of Egypt, greatly affecting the country's tourism industry.¹²⁴ Islamic terrorist groups in Bulgaria could follow these examples and target Bulgaria's tourism industry, which would deal a major blow to its economy.

With these points in mind, Bulgarian security forces should focus on the following:

- Improving security in the following areas: the Pamporovo winter resort, which is located in the middle of the Rhodope Mountain (where Pomaks are concentrated), and the Varna airport and Black Sea resorts.
- Improve security around Bulgaria's nuclear power plant and oil refinery.

B. CONCLUSION

Bulgaria faces several challenges in meeting these potential security threats posed by the very real possibility of Islamic terrorism. First, Bulgaria has a lack of security forces. Moreover, Bulgaria has an insufficient budget for its security forces. Even though heavily underfunded, the security forces face new governmental budgetary cuts and structural reform in a time when the threat posed by Islamic terrorism is real.¹²⁵ The Bulgarian government has to change existing security laws and concepts in order to improve cooperation between security services such as the border police and the Army. Specifically, the Army should be involved in counterterrorism and intelligence gathering operations in the country during peacetime.

Second, Bulgaria needs to better understand its Muslim minority and work to decrease their sense of alienation. The Bulgarian authorities must put more effort into meeting the basic needs of the people from minorities and implement working integration

¹²³ Jim Zarolli, "As Investigation Continues Into Sinai Plane Crash, Russian Tourists Head Home," NPR, November 8, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/11/08/455232308/as-investigation-continues-into-sinai-plane-crash-russian-tourists-head-home>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ *Sofia News Agency*, "Reforms Foresee Restructuring of Bulgaria's Interior Ministry," November 12, 2015, accessed November 12, 2015, <http://www.novinite.com/articles/171749/Reforms+Foresee+Restructuring+of+Bulgaria's+Interior+Ministry#sthash.ZLx39X6o.dpuf>.

programs. The main focus should be education, specifically by increasing the number of educated Roma children as one of the main factors for better integration.

Third, Bulgaria has a weak economy, which limits the amount of resources it can provide to help minorities. In a time of economic shortcomings, the Bulgarian government has to provide as much funding as possible to official Muslim organizations in order to compete with foreign NGOs.

Fourth, Bulgaria needs to devise a strategy for dealing with immigrants, because this problem will not go away soon and is a potential source of instability and even terrorism. Specifically, as an EU country, Bulgaria needs to be active in the debates for managing the increased influx of migrants and helping to devise a comprehensive EU strategy for managing this ongoing crisis.

Fifth, Bulgaria needs to better monitor foreign influence. NGOs, Bulgarians traveling abroad, and the access to radicalizing material are all important sources of influence that should be better understood and monitored. In a democracy, it is difficult to weigh freedoms against security threats. And Bulgaria, just like many other countries, needs to strike a balance between ensuring the security of its people without impinging on their right to practice religion or travel abroad. The best path to ensuring liberties and securities is to better assess and understand the threat posed to Bulgaria by Islamically motivated terrorism.

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